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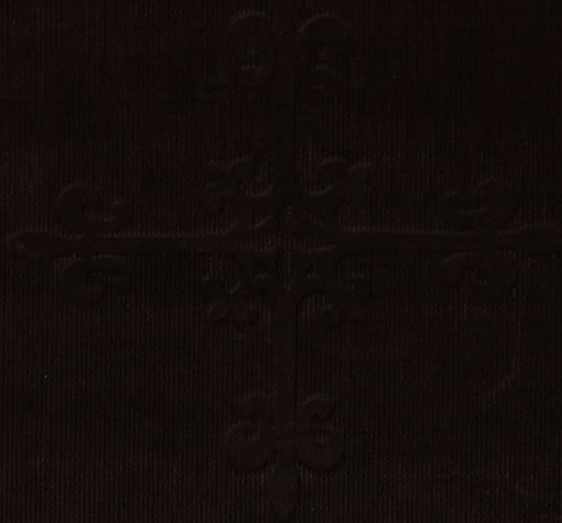
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E. H. L.



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H E Chafy from his Aunt S Shirley Dec. - 1913



A FUNERAL SERMON PREACHED IN
THE CHURCH OF HANLEY CASTLE,
SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 1856,
ON THE DEATH OF
SIR EDMUND HUNGERFORD LECHMERE, BART.
BY THE REV. JOHN RYLE WOOD, M. A.
CANON OF WORCESTER.



For Private Distribution only. 1856.

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A FUNERAL SERMON.

“ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Phil. i. 21.



SUCH, Brethren, was St. Paul's estimate, and such ought to be the estimate formed by every Christian, of “ the life which “ now is, and of that which is “ to come.” Christ, and the glory of Christ, our object here,—Christ, and the glory of Christ, our exceeding great reward hereafter,—Christ constraining us by His love, guiding us by His example, humbling us by His cross, sustaining us by His promises, so that when our day of trial is closed, falling asleep in Jesus, we may awake, revived by His power,
not

1 Tim. iv. 8.

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not to shrink from His presence, but to recognize in the development of His divine attributes the same gracious Master and Friend, whom we have loved and served, and worshipped upon earth. Yes, Brethren, though death shall have passed upon us, we are yet the favoured objects of the same care, the same love, the same mercy, as in life. Death is not the close of, but only a stage in, our existence. The sun which for a time may have been obscured by the passing clouds of this world's sorrows and temptations, and seems to be quenched in the darkness of the tomb, shines forth again with a bright and genial lustre on the Christian's undying spirit, the same though a far more glorious luminary. The Saviour, who Himself tasted the bitterness of death for us, waits to receive His servants passing through the portal of the grave.—He, the same, but glorified Lord, welcoming them into the rest which He has purchased—the glory which He has won for them,
“ Christ

“Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

Heb. xiii. 8.

But it is not in this passage only that St. Paul gives utterance to the thought which he thus expresses. Far from it. The thought of our continued existence in Christ after death, of our life here being only the prelude to our more perfect life in Him hereafter, is a thought which was familiar to his mind. To the Romans he says, “Whether we live, “we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, “we die unto the Lord: whether we live “therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” And in his Epistle to the Corinthians, “We are “confident, I say, and willing rather to be “absent from the body, and present with the “Lord. Wherefore we labour, that whether “present or absent, we may be accepted by “Him.” And in the verses following the Text, “I am in a strait betwixt two—having “a desire to depart and be with Christ, which “is far better.” And in cap. iii. “For our “conversation

Rom. xiv. 8.

2 Cor. v. 8.

Phil. i. 23.

Phil. iii. 20,
21.

“ conversation is in heaven ; from whence
“ also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus
“ Christ, who shall change our vile body that
“ it may be fashioned like unto His glorious
“ body, according to the working whereby
“ He is able even to subdue all things unto
“ Himself.” And thus it was not only with
St. Paul, but with Christians generally in St.
Paul’s day. They did not make that great
distinction which we are apt to make between
this life and the next—or, at least, they chiefly
regarded the next life as a continuance of the
present, though under far happier circum-
stances, and more glorious conditions—and
thus, their faith imparting vividness and reality
to their hopes, “ they were looking for, and
“ hastening unto, the coming of the day of God.”

2 Pet. iii. 12.

And they were right ; and we, dear Bre-
thren, err, greatly err, as far as we fail to
imitate them in their expectant state, and do
not transfer their hopes and anticipations to
ourselves. True it is that the age in which
they

they lived was marked by features very different from those of our own. Persecution was then rife. Secret foes and hidden dangers beset them. "Our flesh," says St. Paul, "had no rest; we were troubled on every side—without were fighting, within were fears." Thus death, in its most appalling forms, became familiar to them. In their perplexities they even courted it; and though, as we have proof in the Epistle to the Theſſalonians, St. Paul had occasion to check the indulgence of excessive grief for departed friends, yet often we may suppose the Church in any city or village "to have mingled with its mourning for a brother or a sister called away, an inward joy and thankfulness that God had been pleased to grant to such a merciful" release from anxiety and from suffering.

Literally, then, to those who in the midst of so great perils had lived to Christ, "to die" was "gain." With us, in our generation, the case is very different. With us, life, for the most

2 Cor. vii. 5.

1 Theſſ. iv.
13.

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most part, passes smoothly. We are all occupied with its necessary engagements,—“Labourers at the plough, merchants with their traffic, farmers in their fields, and rich men with their estates;” and thus, amid so many secularizing influences, when the thought of death, the prospect of another world is forced suddenly upon us, we deem it an unwelcome interruption, and would gladly put it away. The truth is, we do not as did the Christians of old, look forward to the new life as a continuance of the present. By reason of our many comforts and enjoyments, the grave has become reinvested in the imagination of many persons with the terrors of which Christ had despoiled it. In a spirit alien to the Gospel we view death wholly as an evil—a curse without mitigation or alloy; and instead of regarding the righteous as blessed in their summons from the world, speak of them (such is our ordinary language) in terms expressive of compassion, rather than
of

of envy, for their change. Now, surely, dear Brethren, we must confess that this view of death, while it is practically most dangerous to us, argues a very imperfect appreciation of our Christian privileges, and of our “high calling in Christ Jesus.” It is *dangerous* to us, because the mind instinctively recoils from any object which it dreads, and is seduced the more easily into acquiescing in an easy, careless, mode of living—and thus becoming deficient in holy motives of action, it limits its views and aims to this our transitory state. Again, to regard death in the light I have described, proves that we are *insensible* to our *blessings and “high calling in Christ Jesus.”*

Phil. iii. 14.

For, wherefore came our Lord into the world, and why did He vouchsafe to be partaker of our nature, but “that through death
“He might destroy him that had the power
“of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them
“who through fear of death were all their
“lifetime

Heb. xi. 14,
15.

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Rom. viii. 1.

1 Theff. iv.
14.

“lifetime subject to bondage.” To those, therefore, “who are in Christ Jesus, who “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” death has no terrors—its bitterness is passed. Yea, the grave is blessed to those that “sleep “in Jesus;” and contrary to the estimate of carnal men, if we, as Christians, draw a comparison between life and death, “the difference will be, not as the world is apt to “think, in favour of those that live, but rather “in favour of those that die.” For here on earth, as we all know, pain, and sorrow, and sickness, and disappointment are inseparable from life. They are the very conditions of our existence—conditions imposed by God, and fulfilled by His blessed Son, to teach us and all who would follow Him, that we must tread in the same thorny path of suffering and self-denial, and that we too must bear our cross if we would wear a crown. We must share His toils if we would partake His triumph.

But

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II

But death to a servant of Jesus is *repose*—rest from suffering—rest from sin. There in that other scene of being, none of those things which here distress and trouble us, shall vex us any more. “There shall be no more death, “neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall “there be any more pain; for the former “things are passed away.” “Blessed are the “dead which die in the Lord: even so, saith “the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.” Surely, oh surely, with the experience of our own secret trials and spiritual conflicts, we must all believe and acknowledge that to those who by grace have lived to Christ, “to “die is gain.” Surely to such, to “depart “and be with Christ is better.”

These truths, Brethren, are the very essence of the religion of Jesus, of Him who “brought “life and immortality to light through His “Gospel;” and I know none calculated to suggest more blessed comfort and consolation, or truer wisdom and instruction, to those who
are

Rev. xxi. 4.

Rev. xiv. 13.

Phil. i. 21.

Phil. i. 23.

2 Tim. i. 10.

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are assembled to worship in this sanctuary to-day. For to-day there is sorrow for the dead ; but in these truths which I have set before you, the Spirit whispers joy and hope. To-day there is, there must needs be, grief among us here ; but, thanks be to God, grief not unmixed with peaceful and cheering thoughts ; for in him, dear Brethren, the loved and honoured of this Parish and County, the Friend and Benefactor of so many whom I see before me ; in him, as far as we can judge a fellow mortal, were to be traced by those who knew him best, those evidences of a Christian life which enable us to look back on the awful suddenness of his summons from the world as to him a “ gain.” Let me then endeavour briefly to trace those traits and evidences of a character so endeared to us.

In speaking of our departed Brother I shall speak simply—in all Christian truth and soberness. It is no time for flattery now ; nor would I willingly do that from which his
meek

meek and humble spirit would instinctively have shrunk. No ; rather would I so speak, that, while offering to his memory the tribute which gratitude and affection prompt, we may derive from his example, as he would have himself desired, the warning or the encouragement which we may severally need. For to this, and to this end only, whether we regard the memory of the departed, or our own relation to them in the Communion of Saints, is an occasion like the present to be rightly consecrated. So to meditate on their example, so to recall and contemplate the qualities which endeared them to God and to their Brethren, that, praying for grace to follow in their footsteps in the remainder of our earthly pilgrimage, we may at length “ with them have our “ perfect consummation and bliss both in body “ and soul, in God’s eternal and everlasting “ glory.”

With this view, Brethren, if you consider the life of him who hath been taken from us,
you

Burial Ser-
vice.

2 Cor. v. 14.

John xv. 12.

you will find cause to bless God for a pattern of a meek and consistent Christian character. In our departed Brother, faith in the merits of his Saviour, as it formed the only foundation of his own hopes of acceptance with God, so was it the motive of his charity and benevolence to his Brethren. "The Cross is my light,"* was his own expression,—his guide that is, in faith and practice. "The love of Christ constrained" him, and his aim was to exemplify in his daily conduct our Lord's own words, "this is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."

This was with him a deeply rooted principle; but the piety which was its fruit, was not obtrusive nor ostentatious. In matters affecting the truths or interests of religion, he shunned not, indeed, any public declaration of his opinions, when such declaration was necessary ;

* "Crux mea Lux." A favourite motto of the late Sir E. H. Lechmere's, and inscribed, with the device on the title page in many of his books.

necessary ; and we know he was by conviction an attached and devoted member of our reformed Church ; but he preferred to avoid the observation of the world. “ Retired Christianity ”* (this is his own recorded sentiment) “ is the truest ; it is easy to fill the head with notions : but to sit like Mary at Christ’s feet and be a learner is far better—always be afraid of a specious religion.”

In these convictions we seem to have a key to the peculiar and most valuable features in the character of him whom we unite to mourn. His humility and gentleness, combined nevertheless with a strong sense of duty and devotion, even at his own inconvenience and self-sacrifice, to the interests of others—his secret almsgiving, and personal kindness to the distressed—and that conciliatory spirit, in which he ever strove to avert dissensions and compose differences. How valuable were these qualities in the responsible sphere of life in which
Providence

* Inscribed in a Journal of a tour in Piedmont, in 1851.

Heb. i. 16.

Providence had placed him, and how eminently they were developed in the several relations in which he stood to us who are here assembled, as Parent, Brother, Friend, Landlord, and Master, I need not say. You, my Brethren, among whom he went in and out in almost daily intercourse, you know, (and God grant you may lay it to heart for your own profit,) how, though surrounded with the advantages of worldly wealth and station, "he yet wore them all meekly, and "used them christianly," seeking by a faithful stewardship, "a better country, that is, an "heavenly." And to that better country it is our consolation to know that he was ever looking. In the turmoil and pressure of worldly cares and business, there was, as there ever ought to be, an under current of unworldly feelings and spiritualized affections, and a secret aspiration after an abiding-place of rest. He would seem in these things almost to have realized the language of the
Text,

Text, and to have had the comforting assurance ever present to his mind that, striving to live for Christ, death would be to him a "gain." And of this we have a touching proof in a beautiful passage embodying this very thought of the Apostle which he had transcribed with his own hand—"Earth is "man's lodging house, heaven is his home, "and Christ his wealth;"* and again, in another short and simple passage quoted from St. Augustine, "O God, Thou hast made "us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, 'till "it rest in Thee."† Nor was it in life only that he was consistent in this humble self-abasing spirit. In that spirit "he being dead, "yet speaketh!" A friend of the poor while he lived, and ever sensible that rich and poor in the sight of God are equal, he desired to be *as one of them* when carried to his last earthly resting-place.

Heb. xi. 4.

In

* In a schedule of the Documents in the Deed Closet at the Rhydd.

† In his Bible.

A Funeral Sermon.

In his last Will he forbade as far as might be "all funeral pomp, all parade," all the mere outward signs of this world's rank, those mockeries of frail humanity. In the true feeling of Christian membership, he commended his remains to the care of those whom he loved and who loved him in return. Well knowing the worthlessness of outward things, he estimated at its true value the sympathy of the heart, and we cannot, I think, doubt that his greatest joy and recompense would be, if, while you, my poorer Brethren, bore him at his own request, and other sorrowing friends, followed him to the grave, we may all under the influence of true Christian sorrow, have been led to pray as we stood around his bier, and in the strength of our prayer, may have resolved to devote ourselves more and more for the days during which we may yet be spared, to the service of that Saviour in whom our departed Brother "sleeps."

This visitation of God, however, awful in
its

its suddenness, and severe to you, dear Brethren, in your loss of a Christian Friend and Neighbour, will fail in its designed mercy (for mercy tempers even God's severest judgments) if it be not improved by you to its ultimate and true end ;—your closer union with Christ. That it may be thus blessed and sanctified should be ever your earnest prayer to God. The Lord is speaking to you now in accents of solemnity, and with a power in which by many here His voice may never again be heard. “ See then that ye refuse not Him “ that speaketh.” If right impressions have been made on you by your present loss, pray and strive, I beseech you, that they may not pass away ; but that they may become deeper and deeper, and be evidenced to the Lord by your growing love and strengthening faith. And pray not, Brethren, for yourselves alone, there are others for whom, for your own sakes as well as for theirs, your prayers are needed in this hour of their bereavement. It is one
great

Heb. xii. 25.

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great and cheering evidence of God's mercy to you that, if, in the exercise of His perfect wisdom, He has removed one Friend and Benefactor from among you, He has yet left to you another—one anxious to tread in his honoured Parent's steps ; to perform towards you the same offices of kindness and friendship ; and above all, to be joined with those dependent on him in the closest ties of Christian fellowship ; and this for no merely temporal ends, nor for the furtherance of your material comforts only, but who would fain labour to render these subservient to your highest, to your spiritual interests. Too often we are disposed to undervalue the importance, and misapprehend the true nature of our earthly relations. And yet there are few among you who will not confess from their own experience how greatly the well-being of any locality is advanced by the mutual confidence of rich and poor. But then, dear Brethren, this well-being to be real and lasting must

must not depend on mere considerations of individual advantage. Oh, no! it must be based on Religion—on Christian principles—on duties reciprocally discharged for the love of Christ. No less sanction will secure it, but by this all will be secured. Landlord and Tenant, Master and Servant, regarding each other as Brethren in Christ, will “yield to each other that which is just and equal,” knowing “that we all have a Master in “Heaven.”

Eph. iv. 1.

If these convictions shall be confirmed in you, then will the prayers which we have this day offered not be in vain; nor the desire of our departed brother for the diffusion of the Spirit of the Saviour's Gospel among you, which is your blessedness, be unfulfilled.

And now, Brethren, I commend you to the Grace of God. Warned as you have been by this visitation, of the uncertainty of all things here below, live as men waiting for the coming “of their Lord,” live *in* Christ and *for* Christ.

2 Cor. i. 7.

Live

A Funeral Sermon.

2 Theff. ii.
10.

Burial Ser-
vice.

Coloff. iii. 4.

Live “holily and justly, and unblameably” before Him. Seek communion with your Saviour, as well in private and family prayer, as in the public Services of the Church, and especially by partaking of his precious Body and Blood; so that when the time of your dissolution cometh, you “may rest in Him, as “our hope is our dear Brother doth,” and after death at the last and awful day when He, the Lord Jesus Christ, “who is our life shall “appear, ye may also appear with Him in “Glory.”

THE END.



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